

THE NIGHT OF DEATH;

A SERMON,

Preached on the 7th Oct., 1860,

BEING THE FIRST SABBATH AFTER THE FUNERAL OF

THE HONOURABLE PETER M'GILL,

BY THE

REV. WILLIAM SNODGRASS,

MINISTER OF ST. PAUL'S CHURCH, MONTREAL.

"The night cometh, when no man can work."

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THIS SERMON

IS DEDICATED TO THE

Congregation of St. Paul's Church,
MONTREAL,

SOLELY FROM THE SINCERE RESPECT WHICH, IN COMMON WITH THOSE
WHO HAVE REQUESTED ITS PUBLICATION, THE AUTHOR CHERISHES
FOR THE MEMORY OF A BELOVED FRIEND.

S E R M O N .

John ix. 4. —The night cometh when no man can work.

It is evident from the context that these words of our Blessed Lord are directly applicable to himself, and that, viewed in this light, they have a peculiar and profound significance. They were spoken while the day-time of his busy life on earth, with all its marvellous works of might and grace, for the glory of God and the good of man, was yet in course. Having been made like unto his brethren, in respect of the real lowly humanity he assumed, he became subject to the divine arrangement which assigns to each of us a term of existence here,—a day of life, of longer or shorter duration, but exactly and unalterably fixed,—and to the divine will which prescribes to each a certain amount of work to be done within the given years of his pilgrimage, whether they be many or few. In His case there was a great, a glorious, a matchless work to be accomplished, and the period allotted for its performance was very short, and therefore crowded with the proofs of his unwearied diligence in doing it, and with the ever increasing and brightening displays of his fitness and sufficiency to carry it forward to its final com-

pletion. This most wise and faithful worker is our example here, as in every other part of Christian conduct, in that he always lived in view of the solemn and momentous hour, which was to close his appointed labouring day, and proclaim his arduous undertaking for the redemption of man from guilt and misery, and his recovery to long lost purity and happiness, in all its magnitude and grandeur, for ever finished. Hence the frequent touching allusions which he made to the time when he would offer up himself a sacrifice for the sins of the world, and by which he shewed the intensity of his gracious desire and ardent zeal to fulfil an event whereon all human weal and very much of the divine glory were depending. It was in the nearing prospect of this determined limit to his antecedent ministry that he uttered the words of the text. The night of death was close at hand ; and, duly measuring the residue of his work by what remained of the day for doing it, he found a reason and an argument for unceasing application. And, though after his death many great works peculiar to his mediatorial office would receive his attention and engage his unresting activity, he would not have the shades of intervening night to fall upon his closed eyes and powerless arms, as he expired upon the cross, until he had performed every preparatory act of his righteous and holy life. Whatever would require to be said of the distinctive circumstances

of Christ's self-application of these words, were we entering upon a full discussion of this particular topic, we may safely affirm it, at least in point of fact.

But it is apparent from the very language in which it is expressed, that the truth contained in the text is characterised by an obvious pertinency and universal concernment to mankind. It is a warning and admonitory formula for all the living who would not live in vain, but who, knowing they have a work to do, and a time as well as the means for doing it, would strive to acquit themselves manfully and faithfully in the several spheres of labour allotted to them. It is a sacred proverb from the lips of Jesus, intended to sanctify the shortness and uncertainty of our mortal existence, by reminding us of the great end for which we have been made and the lofty aims by which we should be governed, and by guarding us effectually against the disappointment and danger of an idle, unprofitable career. It is, moreover, a declaration of the deeply interesting circumstance, that, in respect of all the actual conditions of humanity, its sinfulness alone excepted, there exists a common ground for the Saviour and the sinner; around which, the Son of Man, representing the whole brotherhood whose nature he assumed, diffuses the hallowing grace of his wondrous condescension in becoming one of us, and from which he pours into the hearts of his earnest

followers the reviving and animating influence of his own example of submission and obedience to the Father's will. As a Master, ever solicitous of the welfare of his servants, he reminds them of the coming night of death which is to bring their earthly service to a close, when it will be impossible for them further to improve the day then past, or redeem the time they may have lost; and thus enforces upon them the necessity of watchful, patient, persevering diligence in the discharge of all life's duties, while now they have light, and strength, and opportunity to attend to them.

It is to this general view of the text, as announcing a fact in which we are all concerned, and by which we ought all to be deeply affected, rendered so much the more instructive and useful by the Saviour's participation in the reality, that I propose for a little to direct your attention on the present occasion. "The night cometh, when no man can work."

The natural night is here employed as a symbol of death, and we have no difficulty in perceiving generally its emblematic fitness. It is possible, however, to stretch the figure to an unwarrantable and extravagant length, and by introducing points of resemblance, which are only partial or casual, impair its character and weaken its effect. I am of opinion that if we rightly consider them, we shall find in the words of the text, which are really explanatory and descriptive,

as well as practical, the principal and by far the most important, if not the whole, of the particulars of the legitimate and designed analogy between the sign and the thing signified. These particulars are all included and very clearly expressed under two general heads—First, the certainty, and Second, the effect, of the coming night of death.

I.—*The certainty.* “The night cometh.” This relates not to the exact time and peculiar manner of death’s coming. To these circumstances the symbol is inapplicable. We can tell to a minute every return of night during any number of future years, and we can describe by well known marks the mode of its approach, as its deepening shades, falling upon the track of the retiring sun, begin to prevail, until the thickness of their darkness completely shuts out the light of day. Not so with death. This last, most ruthless enemy of man, uncertain and insidious, supplies no data by which, in any instance, we can ever surely know, or even nearly guess, the hour of his premeditated advent, or by which we can ever indicate what one of the almost countless ways at his command he will employ to extinguish the lamp of life. He is bound by no physical law, such as in the natural world ensures the occurrence of particular events at stated times discoverable by us, and always at every repetition of its movements shows itself by the same pheno-

mena. As far as the time or manner of his coming is concerned, it is not like the night, but like a thief in the night, who is too regardful of his expected plunder to give any intimation of his approach, and who therefore cometh in a night and at an hour thereof when he is not looked for; and then, after his depredations have been committed, and he has made good his flight, the inmates of the house are apprized of his visit by the damage and loss they have sustained. Thus, man never knows when death is at the door, and too often he refuses to believe that he is near, until his own frame is clutched in the cold and stiffening grasp from which there is no release, or until he realizes the awful presence of the destroyer, in what to him is oftentimes worse than death,—the smitten, lifeless form of a darling child, a revered parent, an affectionate partner, or a bosom friend. The mother who retires to rest, thankful that she has heard her little prattler lisp his prayer by her knee, and that she has invoked upon his head her evening benison from the God of heaven, may awake to kiss his death-closed lips, or startle as she touches his frigid brow. The mail, which we expect to bring us only tidings of health and happiness enjoyed by loved ones in their far distant homes, informs us that other billows than those of the Atlantic now separate them from us. The young, full of promise and big with hope, are prematurely snatched away. The full grown man,

who pursues his plans with unabating vigour and ambition, mapping out his future course and figuring up the successes he anticipates, drops down into the furrow with his hand upon the plough. Even the aged, who bend and totter as they walk beneath the burden of their years, and they who have been long pining and wasting under some slow but treacherous malady, are frequently surprised by the unlooked-for summons which at length bids them depart and be no more. Thus uncertain are the movements of death, and thus varying the mode of his operations; and in these respects the figure of the natural night is inappropriate.

But when we think of death in its actual happening unto all, whatever be the light and shade which play around the dwelling-place of mortals, and whatever be the hopes and fears which alternately possess the hearts of the living, we see that there is something here which may be fitly represented by the coming of the natural night. The original law of separation, which, as we read in the first page of Genesis, was appointed to divide the day and night, and which includes the law of their perpetual succession, is still in force, not to be interrupted or repealed while this globe shall continue to perform its diurnal revolutions. As long as the works of creation shall endure, this memorial of them shall stand, and by its continuance supply a constantly recurring emblem of

the certainty of man's latter end, when he lieth down to sleep "the sleep that knows no waking" to the scenes of earth and time. As confidently as we expect the dawning day to decline, a few hours hence, into the darkness of night, so surely should each man reckon on his approaching death. The day of life may be long or short, calm or troubled, well spent or misimproved, but its close is in the deep cold gloom which every opening grave projects upon our path. No law which regulates the seasons in their course, and makes them productive of that variety which is so accommodating and agreeable to the inhabitants of this world, is more unyielding or uncontrollable than this. The terms of the irrevocable fiat read thus—"It is appointed unto men once to die." And we are daily witnessing the mournful effects of this appointment, as the king of terrors ceaselessly plies his cruel work, driving right and left his well-aimed, fatal shafts, sparing neither youth nor beauty, dignity nor wealth, usefulness nor honor, but hurrying away the subjects of his resistless power and universal dominion, regardless of their rank, and character, and connections, to replenish the dark but spacious storehouse of the tomb. Wherever there is life, whether in the crowded city or secluded hamlet, the gorgeous palace or the dingy attic, there will be seen sooner or later the grim features of death ; there will be felt his terrible, relentless work.

The greater the number of the living, the more frequent their lamentation for the dead ; for it is the dread spoiler's business, unshackled by any such fixed times and seasons as regulate the succession of light and darkness and the blooming and fading of mere material things, to be continually turning man's little day into his last long night, and thus and ever strangely blending the joy which is proclaimed when one is born with the sorrow which is caused when another dies.

Know then, O man, whosoever thou art, that this thy day of merciful visitation, and grave responsibilities, and appointed labour, is hastening on to its inevitable close ! Is it with thee only the morning of thy life, and art thou saying to thyself, " I have many years to live " ? Thy day may have neither noon nor evening. Is it with thee the prime of manhood, when conscious vigour, and buoyant hope, and joyous prosperity fill thy soul with sunshine, and art thou looking forward to a long career of active usefulness ere this, the brightness of thy season begins to decline ? Before the stars appear again in the nocturnal heavens thou mayest be numbered with the dead. Is it with thee the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows are darkened ?* Kindly would we speak to thee, old

* Ecclesiastes xii. 3.

man ! Hast thou toiled unselfishly for thy country's and thy kindred's good ? Hast thou loved and served thine own and thy fathers' God ? Art thou rejoicing now in the faith and hope which are by Jesus Christ, the best remaining portion of thy life ? Have patience yet a little longer. The shades of night are gathering and closing around thee, and soon shall thy spirit return to God who gave it, and thy body lie down in the grave's peaceful rest, there to await the dawn of the resurrection morn.

II. *The Effect of the coming Night of Death.*—“The night when no man can work.” Night is the appointed season of rest from the labours of the bygone day. Then the light is withdrawn, and the scenes of noisy, bustling activity are excluded from the view. Then the plodding merchant and the toiling artizan seek in the still dark hours the refreshing and strengthening repose which sleep affords to their strained energies and wearied frames, and which recruits them for the efforts and fatigues of the succeeding day. This is the wise provision of the bountiful Creator, all whose arrangements in the natural world manifest an extensive and wonderful accommodation to our necessities, and everywhere men find it to be the best thing for them to respect as fully as possible the law by which it is secured. Now, in the fall of night's thick curtain, veiling off the outer world, hushing the din in streets and workshops, and

rendering all vocations, which require the light of day, unseasonable and unprofitable, if not impossible ; in the retirement of all wise and honest workers to the quiet scenes of domestic life ; and especially in the utter unconsciousness of sound untroubled sleep—itself a common Scriptural figure of the state of the departed ; in this, we have a striking emblem of what takes place at death. And, though the greed of gain or the claims of mercy may occasion some exceptions to the general rule respecting the designed effect of night, yet as regards the cessation of all work at death there can be none. The text expressly affirms the impossibility of their existence. In the night of death “no man can work.”

Each man's term of life is the allotted measure of his working day. It describes the space of time to which all his plans and purposes, and all his efforts to accomplish them, are confined. Death brings it to a final close and lays an effectual arrest upon every act and scheme, whatever be the stage they may have reached. “For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave.” Then, as the toilworn labourer, to whom the evening star or vesper bell announces the accomplishment of his day, returns to his humble cot and retires to his couch of rest, forgetful of his servitude and all its weariness, man goes down to his long home, and there is an end to all that he doeth under the sun. Then he re-

signs his property and his projects into other hands, and ceases to control them any more for ever. Then he closes his eyes upon all his earthly affairs, and is no more seen in the abodes of living men. His spirit, whose presence beamed forth intelligence in every feature, and supplied his limbs with strength and vigour, and prompted every pulsation of his beating heart, and circled life through all his veins, quits its material tenement, and leaves it to crumble into dust or become the prey of worms.

This effect of death is universal. It is no respecter of persons, but extends its levelling power to all distinctions. It stops the works of the righteous as well as of the wicked. It seals for ever the character of the just and the unjust. It prevents alike the expression of generous sympathies and the gratification of unholy desires. Under its benumbing influence the premier statesman must let go the helm of national affairs, and the brave warrior lay down his deadly sword, and the skilful mechanic drop his ingenious tools. It gives the finishing touch to the most brilliant as well as the most obscure life-history. It crushes the wordling's fondest hopes and terminates the flow of Christian benevolence. It brings the madness of folly and the strength of wisdom to nought.

In these two respects, and according to the words of the text, as representing the certainty of death to every one of us and its effect in arresting

all our works, the emblem of the natural night is a most fitting and impressive one.

III. Let us consider, in the third place, the right practical bearing of these truths and illustrations, both in regard to our choice of work and our mode of doing it. Certainly we are not here, in the possession of those noble faculties with which our gracious Creator has endowed us, and in the enjoyment of the numerous precious privileges with which we are favoured, to spend our lives in vain. If God has given us a term of life, he has also assigned us a work, a mission, to the accomplishment of which we may devote ourselves therein. We are not of those who deny the fact or dare suppress the thought of man's accountability to God. We are not of those who have no better creed than this, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die." We accept the revelation of the Divine will which has been addressed to us, as the only safe and sufficient exposition of human duty. We credit the inspired record when it proclaims to us the condition of sin and misery into which the fall has brought us, when it describes our need of some great remedy and assures us of the adequacy and availableness of the heavenly provision it unfolds, when it asserts the immortality of our souls and represents the obligations under which we lie to prepare for a coming judgment. And are not these the very first and greatest concerns to which we

should have regard in our daily work? Do they not afford abundant light and direction as to the choice which should guide us in the selection of our most proper employment? Our chief aim should surely be to serve and glorify God in the true spirit of Christian love and obedience, and to do so with animated zeal and unwearied diligence. This is the only honest and honourable course for us to adopt. There are other ways of spending this precious seed-time for eternity. The voluptuary has his dreams of pleasure; the worldling has his schemes of covetous, restless ambition; the trifling dupe of gaiety and folly resorts to his paltry gratifications; the student toils on by the light of the midnight lamp, seeking the wisdom of natural science and the conceits of human philosophy. But to him who is thoroughly awakened to the immortality of his spiritual nature, and to the urgent duty of improving it in the knowledge of divine things, under a prevailing sense of their unspeakable importance, the one great task, to be undertaken first and prosecuted to the last, is that which is expressed in the words of the Apostle, who says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." What is the value of the present time, if it be not to be spent in preparation for eternity? In what will everlasting happiness consist, if not in purity and righteousness as well as peace and joy? And if in regard to the former we know that it certainly

will terminate in the night of death, though we know not how soon, and in regard to the latter, that it is impossible to reach or enjoy it without a better nature than what belongs to us as the posterity of Adam, there cannot be a more pressing and imperative demand than that of giving all heed and diligence to make our calling and election sure. Believe me, you will be all the better citizens, merchants, students, statesmen, soldiers, for being Christians, for the profession of Christianity is not intended to withdraw you from the occupations of public life, but so to regenerate and leaven your distempered natures as to qualify you for the faithful discharge of all your duties, in whatever station or sphere they may happen to lie. And let me assure you by all that is certain in the approach of death and affecting in its ceaseless ravages, and by all that is solemn in the expiring struggle in which mortals close their eyes upon this earthly scene,—the cutting short of the day of grace, the removal of all further opportunity of repentance and amendment, the sealing upon the spirit of the mark and character in which it is destined to return to God, and the departure of the soul into the awful confines of eternity—that, not being Christians, whatever else ye may be, and whatever else ye may do, ye can be neither great nor good, either in the estimation of your own consciences or the approbation of your God. While therefore it is day—the little, uncertain.

fleeting day, at the close of which you must enter into the dark valley of the shadow of death—I forewarn you to acquit yourselves like men in this momentous business, that so ye may approve yourselves to be the children of light on whom the darkness cometh not unawares, but who exchange the haziness of time for the bright unsetting glories of everlasting noon.

Brethren, an event has recently occurred amongst us, which, though more immediately affecting us, is acknowledged by all to be a matter of public interest, and I judge that in referring to it briefly here, I am making a suitable improvement and application of the text.

One of whom it may be justly said, he was both great and good, well known to you all, and indeed I may say, in one way or another, to every citizen in this community, has been recently removed from the scene of his many activities and trials. Compared with the general duration of man's earthly pilgrimage, his life was a long one, having exceeded somewhat the Scriptural limit of three score years and ten. It is no empty encomium, but a most deserved commendation, to say that it was both a busy and a useful one, too. And this is true, not alone of his own professional pursuits, in which his discreetly regulated and methodically industrious habits of business, his high, well-disciplined mental accomplishments, and the ex-

cellent qualities of his heart, formed a rare combination to secure both credit and success, as with God's blessing it actually did, and to command the most implicit confidence of this great commercial metropolis. It is also true of the manner in which he discharged the duties of the many public offices, both important and onerous, for which he was eminently fitted, and to which the universal respect and trust he never once lost gave him an easy elevation. Notwithstanding the many grave responsibilities he thus assumed in the councils of the country, enough in themselves to occupy the entire time and severely test the patience of any ordinary man, to the honour of his memory, now enshrined in the hearts of his many surviving friends and admirers, there is but one opinion as to the distinguished faithfulness with which he laboured, the unflinching integrity of principle by which he sustained his public reputation and consistency, and the real dignity of unaffected simplicity but firm reliance upon right and virtue, which he brought with him to the occupation of every office that he held. Having settled in this city in the early part of the century, his career was coincident with the many stirring events and remarkable changes which form the history of the wondrous development, growth, and consolidation of this country, throughout the interval until now. In that history's page his name will ever prominently figure, and, from its interest-

ing and instructive records, posterity will never hesitate to award to him the enviable distinction, which sheds a lustre on the pathway of the patriot and benefactor. But all this praise, as fully justifiable as it has certainly been well earned, would never have compensated for the lack of better qualities and the absence of nobler honours. If he commanded the utmost respect as a merchant and shone above mediocrity as a politician, he was also greatly beloved as a friend by all who were privileged with his intimacy, and in the highest of all professions, that of the Christian, besides the evidence of sincerity and worth afforded by his unimpeachable moral character, his walk and conversation supplied many pleasing proofs of the successful cultivation and exercise of spiritual graces. You, who have been long accustomed to his presence as a fellow-worshipper, are familiar with his reverend and devout demeanour in the sanctuary, and with his regular attendance on the means of grace. His heart was tenderly susceptible of the emotions produced by sacred things and religious solemnities; and I can testify, that throughout the protracted and painful illness under which he at length succumbed, after bearing it with remarkable patience, and receiving by it many tokens of the Divine favour, and deriving from it many of the precious fruits of sanctified affliction, there was nothing he seemed to regret so much as his separation from the house of God,

more especially on the Sabbaths, when that holy and solemn ordinance we have this day observed was being dispensed,* and repeatedly he gave the assurance that though absent in body he was present with us in spirit. Sensible of many imperfections and shortcomings, he was a frequent visitor to the throne of grace, and attaching the first importance to the Holy Scriptures as a means of enlightenment and confirmation, he earnestly sought in them that knowledge which maketh wise unto salvation. One of the most remarkable and well-known manifestations of his Christianity needs only to be mentioned to complete this brief allusion to its leading traits. He was a man of extraordinary, indeed in the judgment of some, of lavish liberality. No heart ever responded more unsuspectingly and ungrudgingly to the tale of distress ; no hand ever opened so freely and unostentatiously to the claims of poverty. It was not in him to quench the risings of pity or withhold any assistance he could minister. To all our religious and charitable institutions he was a ready and munificent donor, in addition to the services he ever willingly rendered by his presence and counsel ; and the numerous calls made upon him by the necessities and efforts of this Congregation, of which he was an original member, and for many years an Elder, and by the Church with which we are connected, always received the most kindly and fa-

* The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

vourable consideration and elicited his most cordial support.

The day of his active and useful life has set at length in the night of death. Full of honours as of years he has been removed from amongst us. We have deposited his mortal remains in the narrow house where the weary are at rest. His name lives now upon earth only in the remembrance of his many excellencies, and in the lasting gratitude we owe to God for his valuable services. But we trust that he has received that new name by which the children of God are known in heaven, and that spiritual inheritance which is the incorruptible and eternal portion of all Christ's faithful followers. With this hope let us comfort our souls, and in the example which seems to warrant it let us find encouragement to work while it is called to-day. We may be greatly inferior to our departed friend in the attainments he possessed and in the ability to use the opportunities with which he was favoured, even should like opportunities present themselves to us, but his God is our God, and his Saviour our friend and brother, merciful to forgive and gracious to aid, and though it be with us comparatively the day of small things, yet neither the cheerful giver nor the busy worker, who strives to do all to the glory of his Father in Heaven, will be despised in that which he doeth.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE.

The distinguished subject of the following sketch was born at the hamlet of Cree Bridge, in the parish of Monigaff, Wigtonshire, Scotland, towards the end of August, 1789. At his baptism, on the 1st of September following, he received the Christian name of Peter, the family name being M'Cutchon. Like most of the great men whom Scotland has given to the world, he was indebted for his early education to the parish school, the late Reverend Dr. Black of Montreal, afterwards his intimate friend and esteemed minister, being one of his companions. In 1809, when he had scarcely completed the twentieth year of his age, he was induced, by his uncle, of whom mention is afterwards made, to emigrate to Canada, whither so many youths have come from the old country and found the fortune and distinction, which, with less scope and more competitors, they would not probably have acquired so easily at home. He was accompanied by his brother William, who, disliking this country, remained in it a very short time, went to the West Indies, and died there.

Mr. M'Gill in Business.

In the month of June of that year he arrived at Montreal, of which he remained a citizen until his death, that is, for a period of somewhat more than half a century, outliving all his cotemporary settlers with a few exceptions. He entered at once upon the service for which he had been previously engaged, that of a clerk in what was then the large and flourishing establishment of Parker, Gerrard, Ogilvy & Co., who carried on business as general merchants. He did not long continue in this subsidiary position, but at the end of a few years he was admitted as a partner in the similar firm of Porteous, Hancox, M'Cutchon & Cringan. In the year 1824, his rising fortune received a large accession on the death of his maternal uncle, the Honourable John M'Gill of York, (now Toronto), a Member of the Legislative Council, and for many years Receiver General of the Province of Upper Canada, who, having no children of his own, bequeathed to him his extensive and valuable estates, the nephew having previously assumed by Royal Authority the uncle's

surname. "About the same time he formed a new business connection with Mr. Dowie of Liverpool, and with him carried on business for some years as M'Gill & Dowie, the name of the firm being subsequently changed to Peter M'Gill & Co. The disastrous times succeeding 1847, followed by the failure of a friend and business correspondent, brought its share of evil to this great house, though its resources were always more than ample to meet all claims. During the last eight or nine years, however, its business has been limited to an adjustment of old affairs. In good or bad times alike the credit of the house was unimpeachable."* His connection with the Bank of Montreal, for a long time the greatest monetary institution on this Continent, and even yet second only to one in regard to capital, should be noticed here. In 1819, the second year of this Bank's existence, Mr. M'Gill was elected a Director, having been then only ten years in the country, and having spent about half that term in the humble capacity of a clerk. In 1830 the Board of Directors elevated him to the office of Vice-President, and in 1834 to that of President. To this latter office he was elected, every year consecutively, until the annual meeting in the month of June last, when his infirmities had increased so much as to disable him from giving any attention to its duties, and he tendered his resignation. In further illustration of the purely business part of his career, it is to be mentioned that he was elected Chairman of the St. Lawrence and Champlain Railroad Company in December 1834, and served as such from the commencement of the undertaking, the first of the kind in Canada, until the completion of the line between Laprairie and St. John's, when he declined a re-election; that he was appointed Chairman of the Canada Branch of the Colonial Life Assurance Company at its institution in December 1846, which office he held till his death; that in April 1848 he was chosen President of the Montreal Board of Trade, but could not be prevailed upon to hold this office longer than one year; and that, about the same time, he became a Director in the St. Lawrence and Atlantic Railroad Company, of which he continued to be a very influential member until the amalgamation of that undertaking with the Grand Trunk Railroad of Canada in 1854, when he became a Director of this new gigantic concern, and retained his position as such until his death. As a man of business Mr. M'Gill was eminent for his intelligence, cautiousness, and liberal views. The strictly honourable character of all his transactions gained for him the utmost confidence. In one of the numerous public notices, which appeared on the occasion of his death,

* Montreal Gazette, Sept. 29, 1860.

it is remarked, that "he was one of those merchants of whom it is emphatically said, their word is as good as their bond," that "his expenditure and subscriptions on all occasions were characteristic of a Merchant Prince," and, as marking the integrity of his Christian principles it is added, that "at a time when working on the Lord's day was common in almost every counting-house in Montreal, he would not give in to the pernicious custom, but took his place in the little Presbyterian Church of which he was a member."* His success was great; and though interrupted by the heavy losses he sustained on the occasion already mentioned, when a sum of between £40,000 and £50,000 was swept away, these were not incurred by any fault of his, while the manner in which he bore them and provided for them was truly admirable, showing a resolute determination to maintain his honour, whatever the sacrifice might be. A most pleasing illustration of his generosity must not be omitted here. Though it must often have been a hard matter to find time for the requisite attention demanded by his numerous engagements, he was never at a loss for leisure to promote the interests of applicants for his countenance and aid, and the number of those, for whom he found employment, and who can tell of the trouble as well as delight he took in extending to them the substantial benefit of his patronage, is very great.

Mr. M'Gill's Political Career.

He belonged to the Liberal Conservative school of politics, and while his principles of unyielding loyalty to the Crown rendered him a staunch defender of British connection and constitutional government, he was ever alive to the advocacy of internal improvements. In 1832 he was appointed a member of the Legislative Council of Lower Canada, and in 1838 he was called to a seat in the Executive Council. "After the suspension of the constitution in 1837 he was made a member of the Special Council to which were intrusted *pro tempore* the duties of legislation, and on the subsequent restoration of the constitution and union of the Provinces was made a Legislative Councillor for United Canada."†

By virtue of this last appointment he had, along with other gentlemen who were Executive Councillors at the Union, by the Queen's instructions, precedence in the Province of Canada, immediately after the Executive Councillors of the day, carrying on the government.

* Montreal Witness, Sept. 28, 1860.

† Montreal Gazette, September 29, 1860.

Throughout the troublous times extending from 1836 to 1839 he served as President of the Constitutional Society of Montreal, an office which his connection with the government enabled him to fill with special advantage. In the establishment of peace and order at the close of this period, and afterwards in the union of the Provinces of Lower and Upper Canada, he witnessed the accomplishment of objects, which he was actively instrumental in promoting. He was offered the Speakership of the Legislative Council of Canada, by His Excellency, Lord Metcalf, in November 1843, but for various reasons he declined the honour. On this occasion he was highly gratified by a mark of great confidence on the part of the Representatives of Lower Canada, the Honourable Mr. Viger and the Honourable Mr. Quesnel having waited on him, at his hotel in Kingston, on their behalf, to urge him to accept the appointment, as one which would be very satisfactory to them. Subsequently, in 1847, he was appointed Speaker of the Legislative Council and a member of the Executive Council, by Lord Elgin, and served as such until March 1848, when he resigned with his colleagues in the administration. He held his seat as a member of the Legislative Council until his death.

Mr. M'Gill as a Citizen.

His exceeding urbanity, generosity, and public spirit procured for him the highest esteem as a citizen, and led him into walks of usefulness in which the influence of his goodness rendered him eminently serviceable. From the very first he was a member of that most humane and beneficent institution, "The Society of the Montreal General Hospital." His name appears in the charter of its incorporation, of date January 30, 1823, and for very many years he was one of its life Governors. At the formation of the Scottish National Society of St. Andrew in 1835, he was elected President and continued to serve as such, by annual election, until November 1842, when private reasons induced him to resist the solicitations with which he was urged to retain the office. On this occasion, on the motion of the Rev. Dr. Mathieson, it was resolved unanimously, "that the warmest thanks of the Society be voted to the Honourable Peter M'Gill, for the valuable services rendered by him to the Society, as its President since its formation, and that the Secretary communicate this vote to Mr. M'Gill, expressing at the same time the regret of the Society on his determination to resign that office. His occupancy of the Presidential chair of this institution did not, however, cease at this time, for in November 1845, he was again elected by

acclamation and served one year more, declining a re-election in 1846. In 1839 he was appointed a Lieutenant-Colonel of the Militia and retained this rank until his decease. In August 1840, he was raised to the highest civic office, that of Mayor. He was the first Mayor of the city of Montreal under the new act of incorporation, which put this appointment in the gift of the Crown. He would rather have excused himself the acceptance of this honour, and indeed when first offered to him he declined it. This drew forth a communication from the Right Honourable, the Governor General, D. Poulet Thompson, in which it was represented to him, that if he could undertake the duties of the office he would oblige His Excellency, and in his opinion give the Corporation a start which would ensure its success. On further reflection he complied with this entreaty, and continued to act as Mayor until 1st December 1842, when the office was made elective by the Council, and he declined to be put in nomination. During his Mayoralty many and great improvements were made in the City, and on his retiring from the Council Board there was passed a unanimous resolution of the members, conveying to him their most sincere thanks for the very gentlemanly and courteous manner in which at all times he had performed his duties, and their expression of deep regret, that one, whose acknowledged ability and services had been pre-eminently useful, was determined not to be put in nomination at the ensuing municipal election. Besides being an active promoter of civic improvements and a generous patron of charitable institutions, he was also a warm friend of the educational interests of the City. He was President of the Canadian School Society of Montreal, and a Governor of the University of McGill College from the time of its re-organization by an amended charter, in 1852, until his decease. Freemasonry was also a subject of much zealous interest to him, and among some memoranda he has left occurs the following paragraph ;—"I was appointed in 1846 by the Earl of Zetland (Grand Master of England) Provincial Grand Master of Masons for the District of Montreal and William Henry, and in 1847, Provincial Grand Superintendent of Royal Arch Masonry in the Province of Canada, the former of which I resigned in 1850, on account of my health. The brethren on the occasion manifested much fraternal regard and regret."

Mr. M'Gill as a Churchman and Christian.

He was elected President of the Auxiliary Bible Society of Montreal in 1834, and served as such until 1843, when he declined a re-election, and the following resolution was passed at the twenty-second Annual Meeting on the 25th of January, 1843 :—

“Whereas the Honourable Peter M’Gill, who has for many years been President of this Society, has expressed his desire to withdraw from this office, on account of the pressure of other engagements; and whereas this General Meeting of the Society cannot part with their valued President, without expressing their sense of the services he has rendered, therefore it is resolved—1st, That the cordial thanks of this Meeting be offered to the Honourable Peter M’Gill for his long and able services as President of this Society; 2nd, That it is expedient to create an order of Honorary Governors for life in this Society, amongst whom may be placed those who perform valuable services to the Institution, and that such a list be commenced with the name of the Honourable Peter M’Gill.”

Without being actuated by any feeling of bigotry or one particle of narrow-mindedness, he was all his life warmly attached to the Church of Scotland. He seems to have connected himself at once, on his arrival in Montreal, with the St. Gabriel Street Church, and for some time he acted on the committee of management connected therewith. When, in 1832, his friend, the late Rev. Dr. Black, one of the collegiate ministers of that Church, acting under the direction of the Supreme Ecclesiastical Court, formed a new congregation, ever since known as the congregation of St. Paul’s Church, Mr. M’Gill was an active and liberal supporter of the movement. Of that congregation he was a member, held in highest esteem, until his death. On December 28, 1845, under the ministry of the late Rev. Dr. M’Gill, he was one of seven members appointed to the office of Ruling Elder, and as such a member of the Kirk Session. He took very great interest in the general affairs of the Church at large, as well as of the particular congregation with which he was immediately connected. He was one of the original Trustees of the University of Queen’s College, Kingston, a seat of learning constituted by Royal Charter in October 1841, in connection with the Church of Scotland, and specially designed for the education of candidates for the ministry in the Canadian branch of that Church. He remained a member of this Board until his death. On the 1st of October, 1845, “The Lay Association in support of the Presbyterian Church of Canada in connection with the Church of Scotland,” was formed, when he was chosen President, which office has become vacant by his decease. He was also one of the nine Commissioners for the management of the Clergy Reserves, from the passing of the Act prescribing the constitution of that Board, in 1848, and at his death his name was still upon the list of members. A brief notice of the leading traits of his character, as an active and consistent

member of the Church of Christ, will be found in the allusion at the close of the foregoing sermon. It is not proposed to add to what is stated there, but, as showing the estimation of his worth entertained by his brethren in the Session of St. Paul's Congregation, the following extract from a minute placed on their records is inserted :—

“ During the whole of his active and honourable life he was a firm adherent and warmly attached friend of the Church of Scotland. To all her schemes he was a generous contributor, and in every time of difficulty he stood faithfully by her. Raised by the goodness of Almighty God to high station and great wealth, he devoted his influence and his means, in large measure, to deeds of charity and benevolence. An office-bearer in St. Paul's Church, and one of those who originally formed the congregation, he contributed liberally to every thing connected therewith, while he offered an example worthy of imitation, by his regular and devout attendance in the Sanctuary. Well read in the Word of God, he found the Bible, which had been his study from early youth, his comfort and his solace in age and infirmity. Simple and undoubting in his faith, strong and firm in his hope and trust in God, he was humble in his Christian walk and conversation. Visited by his Heavenly Father, late in the journey of life, with heavy trials—a long and painful separation from his family—large pecuniary losses—severe and protracted illness—he bore up under them all with pious resignation. God vouchsafed to him happy and hopeful moments in the hour of death, and a calm departure from the scenes of his earthly conflict. Familiar as a household word, his name will ever be held in honoured and grateful remembrance, while his memory will be especially dear to his Presbyterian brethren and to his fellow-countrymen, throughout the length and breadth of the land. The members of Session gratefully acknowledge God's goodness to their departed friend, bow with submission to His will in removing him hence, and sympathize with his sorrowing family under this bereavement. ‘Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.’ ‘The memory of the just is blessed.’ ”

Last Illness.

Long previous to his death Mr. M'Gill was a sufferer from bodily ailment. As far back as twenty years ago he manifested symptoms of the disease which carried him off, namely, enlargement, with fatty degeneration, of the substance of the heart,—a disease of which many great men have died. As the malady gradually increased it interfered more and more with his ability and comfort in the discharge of public duties, until at

length he was obliged to retire from them almost altogether. Between two and three years ago his strength became quite impaired by its progress, and throughout all that period he was almost constantly confined to his house. On Thursday, the day before he died, he seemed to be somewhat better than he had been for some time previous, but in the evening between nine and ten o'clock he was seized with an aggravated attack, and it became apparent to his medical attendant, Dr. Campbell, that he had not many hours to live. Suffusion of the brain set in and speedily did its fatal work. So long as he could articulate, that is, till within half an hour of his death, he seemed to be in possession of his faculties, and when an appropriate passage of Scripture was quoted or prayer offered up, he devoutly assented to what was said, sometimes adding a remark which proved the strength of his hope and the firmness of his faith. A little before one o'clock on the morning of Friday the 28th September, 1860, in the seventy-second year of his age, his spirit quietly passed away on its return to God who gave it.

Mr M'Gill's parents died many years ago, and he was himself the latest survivor of his father's children by a first marriage. James McCutcheon, Esq., of Toronto, is a half-brother, and, with the exception of his sons, the only surviving relative in Canada.

Mr. M'Gill was married by Special License from the Archbishop of Canterbury, at Brunswick Square, London, on the 13th February 1832, to Sarah Elizabeth Wilkins, who survives.

By this marriage there were three children, all sons. The eldest, John Shuter Davenport, was born 9th June 1834: the second, Sydenham Clitherow, 27th April, 1841: and the third, James George Gerrard, 17th July 1843. The youngest died in infancy, at Guildford, England, on 25th February 1844, after two days' illness. The two survivors are officers in the Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment—the elder, who served with credit in the 60th Rifles at the siege and capture of Delhi, having the rank of Captain, and the younger, that of Ensign. In the Providence of God it was kindly ordered, that notwithstanding years of separation, they were both present at their father's death, having been stationed at Montreal some months before.

The Funeral.

Mr. M'Gill's remains were buried on Monday following his death, being the first day of October. Although the rain fell in torrents there was a very large attendance of leading citizens. The following gentlemen

acted as pall-bearers :—The Hon. Geo. Moffat, the Hon. Justice McCord, the Hon. John Rose, Thomas B. Anderson Esq., D. Davidson Esq., Alexander Simpson Esq., F. Griffin Esq., and John Redpath Esq., the list being in accordance with a memorandum prepared some years ago by Mr. M'Gill, except where death had made a blank and necessitated the substitution of another. Besides the immediate relatives, and some of the more intimate friends, among whom were the Rev. Dr. Mathieson, Dr. Campbell, and Dr. Fraser, the members of St. Paul's Kirk-session attended as chief mourners, also by Mr M'Gill's own request. It being known before hand that the funeral procession would be very large, it was arranged to have the service in St Paul's Church. Thither the mournful company proceeded from Mr M'Gill's late residence in Beaver Hall. Many of the shops on the streets through which the *cortege* passed were closed out of respect for the deceased. The flags of vessels in the harbour were hoisted at half-mast. St. Paul's Church was hung with black. Service was conducted by the minister, the Reverend William Snodgrass. After an invocation the first five verses of the 8th Paraphrase were sung, beginning,

"Few are thy days and full of woe,
O man of woman born."

Then was delivered the following

ADDRESS.

Brethren, we are here assembled to perform the last respectful rites, which a true religious feeling, as well as a commendable sense of propriety, prompts us to observe towards the mortal remains of our excellent and dear departed brother. I desire to improve this solemn and affecting occasion, and therefore address to you a few words, by way of putting you in remembrance of some things, to which if ye give heed ye will do well.

"It is appointed unto men once to die." To this inexorable but righteous law there is no exception. However diversified the circumstances in which the several individuals of a generation spend their days, two facts are com-

mon to the history of them all. The biography of each one is, "he lived and died." As the first withered leaf, which falls upon our path in the beginning of autumn, presages the speedy removal of all the leaves from every tree, so the death of one member of a family, congregation, or community, is a premonition to all the rest that they must quickly follow. And, unlike the natural season, during which, but once a year, the forest is dismantled of its leafy honours, the withering, wasting influence of the fatal chills and blasts, under which man falls, and before which all the glory of his earthly estate fades away, is ever doing its ceaseless work of destruction, proving thereby the perpetual presence of an autumnal term in the abodes of living men, throughout all the years of time. Neither the strength of the strong, nor the wealth of the rich, nor the skill of the talented, can procure an extension of life's allotted period or an exemption from death's destroying power. If anything were potent enough to redeem the prey from the jaws of the devouring grave, would we not all be ready to name the moral virtues which alone make men truly great, and the religious sentiments by which alone men are made truly good? Would we not be disposed to claim indulgence and exception for those, whose well-known disposition and long-tried fitness entitle them, by the spontaneous accord of universal opinion, to the distinction of being ranked as real benefactors of their country and their kind? But, what is the fact? This vast assembly proclaims it more eloquently than any words I can command. Death spares not either the honoured patriot or the consistent Christian. Ay, and even the Christian patriot must die! Let us, who this day mingle the sorrow occasioned by his death with our feelings of admiration for his life, and our humble submission to God's will with devout acknowledgments of God's goodness, learn this, that however much or little may be our ability

or opportunity to follow, by imitation, his eminently useful career, as we severally perform the journey of life, we must all very soon at the latest follow him down to the gates of death.

Brethren, "it is a serious thing to die." We have no voice or record sent back to us from beyond the grave to tell us what may be the nature of that mysterious consciousness, which is the condition of the human spirit, when quivering in the last struggles of its disembodiment from the racked and shattered frame. But altogether apart from this, it is a serious thing to anticipate our latter end—to look forward to the solemnly uncertain moment, when death's relentless summons shall call us hence ; when we must close our eyes to earthly scenes, and cease to engage in this life's duties, and submit to the rupturing of every tie, even the closest and the dearest, by which the various relationships between man and man here below are formed and sustained ; and when, leaving behind us the traces of a well or ill spent life, we must enter upon an eternal existence somewhere in the realms of space, in association with a company of spirits alike immortal as our own. But this seriousness belongs not to death alone. Rightly considered and improved it reflects itself, in strikingly impressive characters, upon each one's advancing history, and, in view thereof, we may not safely trifle with the conviction, that it is a most serious thing to live. As the importance of every praiseworthy enterprize depends in a great measure upon the nature of the end to be accomplished, so the value of our present life is greatly enhanced by the fact, that, if honourably and usefully spent, it is the best preparation for death ; and well it is for us that we cannot repress the persuasion, which reason and religion unite in producing, that the responsibility of man's nature to the will of God and the principles of goodness will not fail to assert itself in the presence of the

king of terrors. It is this, which, in the estimation of all whose faith is sound and whose aims are high, imparts a peculiar interest to the lives of those who approve themselves to be truly great and good, and which makes it an object of most legitimate ambition to imitate that career, assuredly the brightest and the best, which any of us, whatever be our rank, attainments, and privileges, may hope to follow to its end—the career which is terminated by the Christian's peaceful and happy death.

For, though certain and serious, it is not to those who are prepared for it a thing of dubious hopefulness to die. Though we cannot but grudge the spoils of death, when true and faithful friends, and active, exemplary Christians are taken away from us, yet such mournful occasions are far from being unmitigated afflictions. To such friends themselves it is a blessed release from sorrow, suffering, trial, and care, and the beginning of the complete fulfilment and fruition of that lively hope to which they have been begotten again, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; and to us who remain behind, as stricken mourners, in this vestibule of the grave, it is surely far more than a sufficient compensation, to know that their spirits have been conveyed to the region of celestial light, and that, even as regards the body, "the earthly house of this tabernacle," which they leave in charge to us to be committed to its kindred dust, there is for it likewise, according to the pledged and inviolable word of the Prince of Life, a better resurrection. And thus, as the few straggling drops precede the copious and refreshing shower, or as the brightening streaks which gild the eastern sky presage the blazing splendours of the fully risen sun, so the spiritual enjoyments and satisfactions with which the Christian in his humble endeavours to serve and honour God is favoured even here, are the earnest and instalment of that unspeakably happy experience,

which is his promised reward and inheritance hereafter. Wherefore, brethren, let all of us, who as to the body are but mortal, have constant respect to the immortality of our spiritual being, and let such of us as are earnestly striving to be followers of them who are now inheriting the promises, having the like blessed hope which sustained and cheered our brother who has gone before us to his rest, purify ourselves, even as Christ, the Resurrection and the Life, is pure ; and that ye may be confirmed, and strengthened, and established therein, let me read to you a portion of those Holy Scriptures, which, amid all the harassing duties and trials of his public life, formed a daily portion of comfort and delight to our honourable and respected friend, and which in the hour of his death were the means of communicating heavenly consolations to his soul.

Then was read 1 Cor. xv. 19—28, and 35—58. The first five verses of the 53rd Paraphrase, beginning,

“ Take comfort, Christians, when your friends
In Jesus fall asleep,”

were next sung, after which prayer was offered up, closing with the Apostolic benediction. The mournful procession on leaving the Church again formed, and passing through Great St. James and St. Lawrence Main Streets, conveyed the body to Mount Royal Cemetery, where it was laid in the family burying ground.



